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The Dehumanization of Black Males by Police

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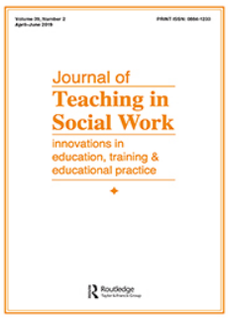

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The Dehumanization of Black Males by Police: Teaching Social Justice—Black Life Really Does Matter!

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ABSTRACT

Despite the contemporary public's discourse regarding the embrace of human diversity within the United States, Black males still are perennially brutalized, killed, and negatively stereotyped. Recent events regarding police killings underscore the reality that even though Black males have the same constitutional and civil rights as all other citizens, in practice their rights are often violated or denied. The negative stereotypes of Black males is problematic because it creates an environment and negative perception of them that causes some police officers to claim that they feared for their life before shooting. In this article the authors discuss the history of police oppression and killing of Black males and offer critical race theory as a theoretical perspective that helps to explain this pervasive social inequity. More important, the authors provide practical classroom narratives, assignments, and strategies that may hold promise in addressing the problem of police brutality and the killing of Black males.

KEYWORDS

teaching social justice; police brutality; excessive force; Black males; unarmed Black males; critical race theory

If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?

In the 50 years after the passage of major civil rights legislation in the country, Blacks are still stereotyped, stigmatized, dehumanized and blamed for many of the social ills that this nation confronts. Black males are particularly pilloried, and even though they have the same constitutional and civil rights as all citizens, in practice their rights often are violated and denied. The negative stereotype of Black males is problematic especially because it creates an environment and negative perception of them that causes some police to claim that they feared for their life before shooting them (Park & Kim, 2015). As is discussed, police killings of unarmed Black males are not a new phenomenon. What is new are the technological advances, such as cell phones with camera capability, that help to bring these incidents to the public forefront (McLaughlin, 2015).

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The profession of social work espouses the worth and dignity of all individuals regardless of their socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity, gender, political views, or other status (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2015). The Council on Social Work Education is the national association of social work educators that safeguards and improves the quality of social work education by setting and maintaining national accreditation standards for baccalaureate and master's degree programs in social work. Although certain courses must be taught in all social work programs accredited by the Council on Social Education, faculty have autonomy on the methods and topics that are used to address curricular material. To that end, depending on what foci the faculty wish to cover in their class to meet course objectives, information on police killing of Black males may or may not be incorporated into course content.

The authors of this article join social workers, social scientists, and others concerned with this issue who have called for the cessation of these killings. We discuss the history of police oppression and contemporary examples of killing of Black males and present a theoretical perspective that helps to explain these actions and social inequities. Although Black females also have been killed by police, and their deaths are equally important, many more Black males have succumbed in this manner, and therefore the authors focus on Black males (Williams, Ritchie, Anspach, & Harris, 2015). We conduct this examination by utilizing critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical perspective that helps to explain the social inequality of this population. All the authors of this article are currently faculty members who teach at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and who sometimes get resistance from students when teaching about racial inequality. We therefore discuss narratives on how we teach, advocate, and address the social inequity that Black males face in contemporary American society.

Literature review

In the 1960s, urban rioting erupted in Newark, Detroit, Los Angeles, and in more than 150 other cities in Black and poor inner-city neighborhoods across America. As a response, President Lyndon Johnson created the Kerner Commission early in 1968 to investigate the causes of the riots. The Commission concluded, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal" (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968, p. 1). However, Johnson rejected its recommendations. Rather than creating opportunities for many Blacks, our political leaders pivoted to racial politics and racialized incarceration. Months later, Republican Richard Nixon would win the presidential election of 1968, on a "law and order" platform (called the "Southern Strategy") that appealed to disaffected Southern white voters (Katel, 2016). In 1980, Ronald Reagan would continue this appeal

by using racially coded terms like "welfare queens" and "strapping young bucks" when he kicked off his campaign as the Republican nominee in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where three civil rights workers had been murdered by local police and the Ku Klux Klan in 1964.

As civil rights laws and affirmative action programs took effect across America, racial politics did not end. Reagan's successor, George H. W. Bush, when running for president in 1988, aired a campaign advertisement portraying his Democratic opponent, Michael Dukakis, as soft on criminals and crime. The advertisement stated that a black convicted murderer, Willie Horton, raped a white woman while on a prison furlough program when Dukakis was a governor (Katel, 2011).

In 1992, rioting broke out for 5 days, after the acquittal of three charged with assault and the use of excessive force in a videotaped beating of an African American named Rodney King after a high-speed chase through Los Angeles County. Then, as the result of urban crime skyrocketing during a crack cocaine epidemic, Congress passed and President Bill Clinton signed into law in 1994 the largest anticrime bill in U.S. history, mandating life imprisonment without parole after three violent or drug-trafficking convictions. States adopted similar measures, which caused a huge spike in the prison population—and an increase in racial disparity (Katel, 2016).

In the two decades since, the issues of police misconduct, racial bias, and the mass incarceration of Black males have grabbed the public spotlight and led to calls for criminal justice reform. Alarmed by the number of Black men behind bars, law professor Michelle Alexander has referred to the criminal justice system as the "new Jim Crow" (Alexander, 2010).

Young Black males are at a higher risk of being shot to death by police officers. According to a report prepared by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, the killing of Blacks by "law enforcement, security guards and stand-your-ground vigilantes" increased from one every 36 hours in the first part of 2012 to one every 28 hours by that year's end (Ragland, 2014). It should also be noted that much of the data on this topic may be deflated because it is self-reported by law enforcement units and not all police departments participate in reporting these types of deaths (Gabrielson, Jones, & Sagara, 2014). Still, according to recent yearly reports submitted from 2005 to 2012 to the Federal Bureau of Investigation by some local police departments, a Black person was killed by a White police officer nearly two times a week (Johnson, Hoyer, & Heath, 2014). Moreover, research analysts at ProPublica reported that African American males are 21 times more likely to be shot to death by police officers than their White counterparts (Gabrielson et al., 2014). ProPublica examined 1,217 deadly police shootings from 2010 to 2012 in the federal database and found that "blacks, age 15 to 19, were killed at a rate of 31.17 per million, while just 1.47 per million white males in that age range died at the hands of police" (para. 2).

Other statistics, such as the number of Black women who have been killed by police officers and the ages of the victims, are difficult to determine because the data are incomplete and the numbers given are usually anecdotal. However, several recent studies on these demographics are useful. In 2014, 12 Black women and 292 Black men were killed by police (Stephens, 2015). Journalist Lauren Barbato (2015) wrote that the Bureau of Justice Statistics kept data on arrest-related deaths in the United States between 2003 and 2009. She found that 95.5% of those 4,813 arrest-related deaths were men, whereas only 4.5%, (218) were female. Gabrielson et al. (2014) noted that Black boys are killed at a very young age. According to their study, "there were 40 teens, 14 years or younger, reported killed by police from 1980 to 2012; 27 of them were black; eight were white; four were Hispanic, and one was Asian" (para. 15).

Police shootings and brutality toward Black men is nothing new. In fact, it has been occurring for decades. The Black Panther Party was founded in 1966 primarily as a self-defense organization to follow police around to monitor the behavior of the Oakland, California, police department and to record incidents of police brutality—the conceptual forerunner to today's police-violence cell phone. This activity was highlighted in director Spike Lee's film *BlackkKlansman*, in which Kwame Ture, the former Black Panther member known as Stokely Carmichael, was shown giving a speech about police murdering Black people at a rally for students in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in the 1970s.

After years of increased police shootings of Black men, accompanied by increasing public outcry, the country is finally waking up to the problem. *Time* magazine's April 20, 2015, cover featured the headline "Black Lives Matter," and in an article written by *Time* magazine journalist David Von Drehle (2015), he highlights some of the high-profile cases in which dozens of Black males have been killed by police or authority figures. In February 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was shot and killed after an altercation in Sanford, Florida, with a volunteer neighborhood watchman. On April 12, 2014, Freddie Gray was arrested by police, sustained life-threatening injuries while under police supervision, and died several days later in Baltimore, Maryland. In July 2014, Eric Garner, age 43, died after being wrestled to the ground by police officers and placed in an illegal chokehold in New York City. Later that summer, on August 9, 2014, unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown was fatally shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. On April 4, 2015, Walter Scott, age 53, was shot and killed as he was fleeing from a police officer in North Charleston, South Carolina; the shooting was captured on video (Von Drehle, 2015).

All of the aforementioned killings sparked protests, and sometimes riots, around the country and created a frenzy on social media with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. In most of these cases, either there were no indictments of the police officers involved or, when indictments were handed down, the prosecution failed to gain a conviction. According to then Federal Bureau of

Investigation director James B. Comey (2015), in some communities across the nation, like Ferguson and New York City, "there is a disconnect between police agencies and many citizens—predominantly in communities of color" (para. 5).

Black men have become the face of crime in America. Being a young Black male is to be associated with criminality, deviousness, and violence and to be considered innately inferior, violent, and animalistic—a person who should be feared. As Wacquant (2002) stated, "The reigning public image of the criminal is … that of a *black* monster, as young men from the 'inner city' have come to personify the explosive mix of moral degeneracy and mayhem" (p. 56). Taken to its logical conclusion, such thinking gets dangerously close to providing a rationale that Black men deserve to be shot dead. Given the rise in excessive force on Black men by police officers, and repeated calls from all corners of American society for criminal justice reform—from members of Congress, to presidential candidates, to public policy think tanks, civil rights organizations and the streets of the nation—perhaps now is the time to fully address this problem.

The historical context of police relations with African American males

A better understanding of the current police relationship with Black males calls for a review of the origin and intent of policing in America and how it has evolved to its current state. The police forces in America have been linked to the institution of Slave Patrols and Night Watchers during the era of slavery (Dulaney, 1996; Gilbert & Ray, 2015; Kappeler, 2014). These patrollers were usually White men who were sanctioned to control the movement and behavior of slaves (Nelson, 2000). The slave patrollers were sanctioned to maintain a system of enslavement and the established racial order (Dulaney, 1996). The concept was so popular that in 1837, the 100-member slave patrol in Charleston, South Carolina, was the largest police force in the United States (Gaines & Kappeler, 2005; Shelden, 2001).

Although these practices were known to be widespread in southern states, they were present across the nation. In some cases, they were sanctioned by state laws such as a 1705 Virginia statute that allowed for whipping and mutilation by slaveholders as punishment for crimes committed by slaves and a 1723 Maryland law that allowed African Americans who struck a White person to be punished by having their ear cut off (Nelson, 2000). The patrollers were allowed to operate with virtually no accountability and as a result adopted brutal tactics such as castration, maiming, and lynching to accomplish their goals (C. Anderson & Anderson, 2006; Chaney & Robertson, 2013). Lynching became widely used as an effective tool of policing Black communities (Fitzgerald, 2007) and for depicting Black males as a social problem (Fitzgerald, 2007; Muhammad, 2011). From 1881 to 1968 more than 4,000 lynching cases were recorded, and

70% were Black males (Gabrielson et al., 2014; Parks, Johnson, McDaniel, & Gladden, 2014). After slavery formally was outlawed in 1865, a new form of corrupt and abusive enslavement called *peonage* emerged across the South. Pulitzer Prize–winning author Douglas A. Blackmon (2009) chronicled this form of peonage in his book *Slavery by Another Name*. Black men would be picked up and arrested by law enforcement on "trumped up" charges such as vagrancy, and when assessed large fines and court costs, forced to work—often to death—for a local employer who paid off their fines for them (Katel, 2016). The majority of the Black males lynched in the report were accused of violating a racial norm (Loewen, 2005). Further, Ward (2012) approximated the rate of killing of Blacks from 1890 to 1917 through burning and hanging (particularly those who resided in the South) to about two to three persons per week.

There were very limited efforts by local government and law enforcement to protect the rights and liberty of Black Americans. The former Confederate government did not provide protection for Blacks, and in some situations they created a nonprotective environment by passing a series of "Black Codes" that economically and socially disenfranchised Black citizens (Nelson, 2000). Such acts of violence continued into the late 19th century, a period that marked the emergence of formal police forces in cities and counties in America (Sidney, 1983). It is argued by some that the current institution of policing and law enforcement is the closest approximation of the extension of such aforementioned sociohistoric tenets rooted in the earlier days of racialized social control (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Gilbert & Ray, 2015). Chambliss (1994) suggested that perhaps police departments are simply the images of the sociocultural makeup of the larger society.

Social inequalities that exist in the society are likely to manifest in existing institutions, such as law enforcement. Hence, an attempt by law enforcement to preserve social order by controlling those deemed to be social misfits may result in arrangements that benefit segments of the population to the detriment of others (B. W. Smith & Holmes, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Justice, in 2002, more than 26,000 citizens' complaints of excessive use of force were filed with local law enforcement agencies by individuals, constituting 6.6 per 100 full-time sworn officers (Hickman, 2006). There also is a pattern and higher level of interaction between police and young Black males compared to Whites and other races (Correll, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2007a; Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 2012; Weitzer, 2014). Due to the lack of a standardized database, the precise statistics regarding police killings of young Black males are likely to be underreported and underestimated (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Gabrielson et al., 2014); nevertheless, existing statistics paint a dire picture.

The racial disproportionality of actions against Blacks has been linked to both racial bias and prejudicial attitudes harbored by the police (Engel, Calnon, & Bernard, 2002l; Warren, Tomaskovic-Devey, Smith, Zingraff, & Mason, 2006) and characteristics of the location of the Black community (B. W. Smith & Holmes, 2014). For instance, D. A. Smith (1986) reported that the use of force by

police against Blacks is not only a factor of individual racial makeup but also contingent upon whether the officers are assigned to predominant minority or to racially mixed areas. The last few decades have witnessed mass expansion and militarization of police forces across the nation, especially in urban communities, and research has shown that police patrolling in neighborhoods of underrepresented racial groups and neighborhoods with high crime rates use more force (D. A. Smith, 1986; Terrill & Reisig, 2003). The result has been the intended (or unintended) perpetuation of the historic trend of oppression and marginalization of Black males. As a result, Black males are profiled as criminals and deviants who are unapproachable and to be greatly feared (Cornileus, 2012). This profile then often is a determinant of how they are treated by police (Bell, Hopson, Craig, & Robinson, 2014; Hutchinson, 1996).

Any attempt to have a meaningful discussion, aimed at addressing the issue, should address the foundational ideologies that have shaped current police practice. We hope, as a result, a new form of policing gradually will emerge that respects and upholds the civil rights of all citizens, which includes Black males. What follows is a theoretical perspective that helps to explain the social inequity of Black males.

Critical race theory and the policing of Black males

Research has shown that the views some have about the police are shaped both by personal and indirect experiences (Weitzer, 2010). However, most empirical studies neglect to provide a theoretical framework to explain the perceived racial differences concerning perceptions of and experiences with the police (Bolton & Feagin, 2004; Warren et al., 2006).

In terms of Black males, and their unique perceptions of and experiences with the police, we believe CRT provides a theoretical perspective useful for gaining a better understanding.

CRT emerged from the civil rights movements of the 1960s and draws from a body of literature that extends to the area of law; seeks to study and transform the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001); takes into account the influences that White supremacy has had on the American psyche (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995); and can be further extended to the area of police brutality (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). It offers a foundation for understanding the historical racialized experiences of Black men in America (Aymer, 2016). CRT provides an important premise for the historical context of how present-day racial inequality and oppression should be analyzed. It illustrates how killings and violence by police are a consistent, persistent, and inescapable truth for Black men. CRT captures how race is structurally embedded within institutional structures (such as law enforcement) and increases the likelihood for disparate treatment of marginalized groups (such as Black males) to keep them subjugated.

The tenets of CRT are (a) the primacy of race and racism and their interconnectedness with other forms of subordination, (b) a questioning of the dominant belief system's status quo, (c) a commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) adoption of a multidisciplinary perspective (Solorzano et al., 2000; Zuberi, 2011). In terms of relationships with police in many marginalized communities, a central tenet of CRT is that racism is customary and deeply engrained in the fabric of American society. It therefore influences the way in which society operates and is a common, everyday experience for most people of color. For example, many Black males are aware of social and structural problems that result in the conflict they frequently experience with the police. Thus, for Black males (especially youth) to be more successful in life, and less likely to have negative encounters with the police, countless social and structural issues must be addressed.

CRT has established that the liberation of Black people in America cannot occur without interrogating and analyzing how the horrific reality of past enslavement, centuries of discrimination, and present-day unequal treatment have affected this cohort. As one of the core values of the NASW Code of Ethics (2015) posits, the dignity and self-worth of Black men has always been denied. This reflects a worldview of White racial superiority and Black inferiority (Alexander, 2010; Hooks, 1995). As noted, Black people often are viewed as a "dangerous other," animalistic and violent (Jiwani, 2002; Taylor & Stern, 1997); in this context CRT informs the proposition that race must be recentered in our discourse on the police shootings of unarmed Black men in the United States (Hadden, Tolliver, Snowden, & Brown-Manning, 2016).

Due to these stereotypes, a critical race approach suggests that not taking race into account hinders optimal law enforcement practices and helps us gain an understanding of why police officers view Black males as potential perpetrators and how race is related to aggressive actions against Black males (Jefferis, Butcher, & Hanley, 2011). Unfortunately, most people who have not been oppressed may find it difficult to comprehend the issues being discussed here. Indeed, only when the larger society examines, through the lens of Black males, why they are targeted by police can a full understanding of CRT be reached. With respect to the social work profession, we believe that the tenets of CRT will enrich social workers' ability to recognize and remedy institutional racism while promoting a much needed dialogue about how the acknowledgment of race in policy and practice can lead to social action and progressive social change (Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014).

The highly publicized cases of police using deadly force against Black men in the United States have caused NASW to support the U.S. Justice Department's continuing efforts to bring about police reforms and promote community policing. Finally, CRT complements NASW's core value of social justice because it acknowledges the importance of social workers being trained to be culturally competent and to be able to examine racial disparities

from a macro perspective. Hence, CRT can be used as an important backdrop for helping students make the connection between the historical and contemporary negative treatment of Black males as a result of racism and its outgrowths of stereotyping and discrimination, in all of their various forms.

Teaching social work students about police brutality and the killing of Black males

We now present narratives on how we teach to address the social injustices so often experienced by Black males.

Narrative 1: Book review and roundtable discussion

As a professor of social work at a Research I urban university with 28 years of teaching experience in higher education, I have experienced the uneasiness that some students feel when presented with issues involving race. In response, I have learned to use a range of methods to teach racial issues such as inviting guest lecturers (particularly making use of White lecturers because their messages often are received by students in a way that an African American professor's is not (Ngwabi, 2012), making class visits to agencies that serve marginalized groups, and assigning reading materials that have been written by people of diverse racial backgrounds—all in an effort to debunk some students' belief that Black professors have their own hidden agendas when teaching about racial matters (Baszile, 2003; Goldstone, 2013). I developed an assignment for use in a social work practice course that has been well received by most of my students.

The purpose of this assignment is to help students analyze social problems affecting vulnerable or marginalized populations. Further, it is structured to assist students in reviewing literature that discusses how Black males historically have been treated negatively in American society and then make connections to the contemporary way in which society adversely responds to encounters with this population. The intended outcome of this assignment is that students will gain the capacity to critically analyze social problems that impact marginalized populations and be able to synthesize evidence-based intervention literature to inform their strategies for creating community change. (I did not survey student responses and experiences with this exercise, although this could be built into future use of this assignment.) The assignment was challenging because many of my students see racism as an issue of the past. They generally have difficulty making a connection between historically negative views of Black males and how this reality is manifested in contemporary society, as the assigned text points out.

In my courses, I give emphasis to the plight of African American males due to the increasing issue of the questionable deaths of men such as Travon

Martin, Johnny Lee Butts, Ezell Ford, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Jonathan Ferrell, and others whose loss has brought many questions and much discussion among social workers in these trying times.

Course assignment for narrative 1

Students conduct a review of the book *The Assassination of the Black Male Image* written by Dr. Earl O. Hutchinson (1996). It is not to be a book report (i.e., a summary of the contents of a book) but rather a critical analysis, discussing issues the author advances, or fails to pose. This review is to be written for those who might not have had time to read the book but who need to learn more about its content. Although the Hutchinson text is dated, many of the examples of inequality and inequity that he points out still are issues for Black men more than 20 years later. It is expected that, through this assignment, students will be able to appreciate that across the span of time, the plight of Black males in America has not improved very much (E. Anderson, 2009; Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012).

As prospective social workers, students are asked to examine how they can have a positive impact on the life outcomes of this particular client population via a close analysis of the text that was selected to highlight salient issues within (and among) African American males. At the end of their review, students are asked to include an additional section titled "My Thoughts" where they are expected to support their statements with sources from peer-reviewed social work journals and then discuss the following: (a) In light of the social unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, and the police killings of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, what are three of the most salient issues today facing Black men and men of color? (b) Is this text relevant for addressing the issues currently faced by Black men, and if so, how? (c) What three intervention strategies do you propose to address the issues that you identified in the first question? Finally, following their book review, students participate in a roundtable discussion of the text for which I identify a topic that students are to critically discuss. All students are given an equal opportunity to participate in the discussion, and all critical points of view are considered.

As stated, this assignment has been well received by the students each time it has been used. For Black students, the assignment provides a bridge between the past and the present oppressive treatment of Black males by society and police. Similarly, often White students are able to make the connection as well, although some White students still are not able to make the connection between historical and contemporary oppressive treatment, even in light of data that support the presence of oppressive practices toward this population.

Narrative 2: Selected readings on intersectionality and small-group discussions

While a doctoral student at a predominantly white research one institution in the Upper South, I was assigned to teach a cultural diversity course to a group of MSW students. The class comprised three African American females, 17 White females, and two White male students. As this was now my 2nd year as an adjunct, I was more confident in my ability to teach graduate students and believed that my race and ethnicity would support my efforts to teach structured racial dialogue as a subcomponent of cultural diversity. I was wrong. At the end of the semester I received negative student evaluations. Several students stated that I was furthering a secret agenda and that they oftentimes felt attacked. Although the words *African American*/*Black* were not used, I concluded from the context of the complaints that this was the basis of the criticism. I was mortified, since that was not my intention. Consequently, I came to the realization that I needed another approach to teaching this subject matter in general, and *white privilege*, in particular.

A few years later, I received my first academic appointment at a predominantly white research one institution in the Deep South. One of the courses I was assigned to teach was on cultural diversity, which was very similar to my previous assignment. To stave off any complaints, I conferred with the dean on the problems I previously encountered while teaching cultural diversity. The dean suggested that I solicit the support of a white faculty member (male) to guest lecture on the sensitive subject of *white privilege*. I took the dean's advice and sat in the back of the class and watched as he nervously selected his words, skirted the topic of white privilege, and gradually shifted the discussion to social work practice and his vast experience. The topic of white privilege was neither broached nor discussed, and I moved on after his lecture feeling that I had done something wildly inappropriate. I vowed to research options for people of color teaching in PWI and how they discussed sensitive topics involving race and ethnicity. I reviewed countless texts and articles and discussed the subject at conferences with my peers. The consensus was that *white privilege* was not an easy subject to broach for people of color teaching at PWI and therefore complaints were inevitable. However, I could not buy into this perception. I found it very unsettling, as I believed there had to be a way to teach this sensitive subject.

A year or so later I attended a conference and listened to a speaker discuss the concept of intersectionality. I was convinced that I needed to learn more about this concept and how I could use it as a theoretical framework for my cultural diversity course. The following semester I taught my first course using the theory of intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). The course was very successful and received great student evaluations, and a manuscript was published to highlight the details of the course (Robinson, Cross-Denny, Lee, Werkmeister, & Yamada, 2016).

Course assignment for narrative 2

The students were divided into groups of five to seven persons, based on the concept of team-based learning (Robinson, Robinson, & McCaskill, 2011), and assigned to read the articles by African American Policy Forum (n.d.), Association for Women's Rights in Development (2004), Crenshaw (1991), Knudsen (2007), and Nash (2008) prior to coming to class. Each group was asked to discuss how intersectionality could be used as a basis for discussing the sensitive topic of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality among a group of high school students. One group recommended using the topic of racial profiling by law enforcement and what it does to a community. This highly charged suggestion was echoed by many students in the class as a result of the recent and highly publicized shootings of African Americans by police. In addition, this suggestion gave rise to several side discussions about Freddie C. Gray, Jr., Walter Scott, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner and their encounters with police. The students discussed how race was a socially constructed concept that is based on physical characteristics and questioned how police often draw conclusions about a group of citizens based on limited and flawed information. One offered that the issue of race is woven into the very fabric of American society, and therefore police officers subconsciously use race to govern their interactions with citizens.

This discussion flourished as other students elucidated how the concept of intersectionality could prevent unjust actions from being taken against men of color because the police and the broader society would take into consideration other factors that influence that individuals' makeup. One student pointed out that I (the instructor) was an African American male with a PhD and therefore would be treated differently by the police. I interjected to explain that I was recently stopped on a rural road for no apparent reason as the police officer passed me by going in the opposite direction. As our eyes met, he immediately made a U-turn and pulled me over. Fear slowly crept over me as I thought about what can happen to men of color stopped by police. Moreover, I was on a deserted rural road surrounded by farmland. I slowly found my voice, I questioned why I was being stopped, and the officer said that I crossed the solid yellow line. I spoke clearly and with conviction that this did not happen, and he issued a written warning and advised me to be careful. I could not determine if he was talking about driving more carefully or watching what I said. I quickly rolled up my window and drove away carefully; I remembered a likely perception to him that I was just another African male, and many of my students empathized with me and expressed concern over the situation. The discussion continued as others gave accounts of shopping while Black, jogging while Black, and other activities that occurred where they were singled out for what they believed was racially motivated. In addition, each student was required to provide a reflective answer to the question: What feelings and thoughts did you experience when analyzing the police and the professor's situation?

The discussion concluded with many students coming to a realization that race is just one factor that comprises who we are and that gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, political beliefs, class, age, sexual preference, education, geography, and many other factors contribute to our makeup as human beings and, more important, the significance of how close we are to accessing power and privilege. Likewise, it is reasonable to assume that the convergence of these factors contributed to perceptions of African Americans by police, which lead to the stop/interaction, and sometimes to their untimely deaths. Consequently, the students resolved that police officers should not be too quick to judge based on race or gender alone but understand that gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, political beliefs, age, sexual preference, education, geography, and many other factors work in concert and influence perceptions. The consensus was we needed to have more conversations about police treatment of African Americans.

I considered this outcome a success, as I did not have to discuss the topic of *White privilege* in isolation as students came to realize that Whiteness does have privileges but that other factors contribute to how we look at individuals, and how we often segment people in groups based on physical attributes. Moreover, the discussion was enlightening because we were able to apply the concept of intersectionality to real-life events such as police shootings of unarmed African Americans. The principle of intersectionality also has a place in social work practice and research. Clients require social workers and other helping professionals to understand their individual struggles, which can be achieved only through genuine cultural humility. Research findings usually may not be generalizable to an entire population since no group of people is exactly the same as another, nor do they necessarily have the same needs. After the semester ended, intersectionality earned a permanent place in my curriculum and teaching philosophy.

Narrative 3: cultural diversity discussion

As the only assistant professor of social work at a small liberal arts college in a small city, there have been quite a few challenges teaching a cultural diversity class, especially when it comes to the topic of race. In every course that I teach, assignments are given for students to complete. However, I am a firm believer that clear, open communication with students is a key element in helping them learn. Essentially, my pedagogical approach is based on the social work principles of empowerment and sense of community and that students must be capable of linking their micro, mezzo, and macro skills because they lay at the heart of promoting social justice and the goals of the social work profession.

Course assignment for narrative 3

Students of color confront unrelenting discrimination and oppression as part of their everyday college experiences at historically White institutions (W. A. Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002). The findings in multiethnic college surveys suggest that such students, both female and male, often struggle to survive academically while battling against societal racism (Allen & Solórzano, 2001; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). Before the start of the fall 2014 semester, two major events happened: the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown.

I was engrossed in watching the news media for hours and then realized that classes at my university would start in a week. How will I feel when I see my students? What will they say to me about what happened? How will we talk about the situation, and for how long? I was scheduled to teach a cultural diversity and social justice course and never had a problem engaging my students about social issues in which injustices occur. However, this felt different because when I saw Eric Garner, and saw Michael Brown, his mother, and his father, they symbolized what Blacks have long faced and are facing today in America.

On the first day of class I was ready, and excited to see my students. I feel there has always been mutual respect and open dialogue in my classes with vulnerable populations and social justice, but would we now be divided by race, just as the country had been? When class started, most of the students said they could not wait to talk about what happened in Ferguson, Missouri. The demographics of the class were four White and seven Black students, all female. The Black students quickly expressed their anger and how they "feel like we are going backwards." The White students sat quietly, and then one said, "I am sad about what happened because no one should be treated that way for being Black." As for the two Black male students I saw later that day, one said, "They do not care about us. They just see us as a threat and not human." I said, "Who is they?" He replied, "White people." As the conversation continued, he also included White professors. He talked further about being in a classroom with some White professors in which he felt marginalized. When I met the other Black male student, he expressed after class how glad he was to see me because none of his other professors, who were all White, brought up the incident at Ferguson.

Throughout the semester, we continued talking about the importance of advocacy; organizing; the NASW Code of Ethics; and the intersectionality of race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation. The university was quiet about the protests going on across the country, and my students were frustrated about that, but there wasn't silence in my classroom. The students wanted to fight for justice but voiced not feeling supported to do so. Therefore, we consistently discussed how covert institutional racism continues to operate through policies and practices embedded within social

structures, systems, and organizations that historically and systematically have produced racial inequality for Black Americans.

The Black students were proud to have allies, and both White and Black students communicated how most faculty and administrators were "missing out" on what solidarity looks like. I recalled the Freedom Riders and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. This new generation of activists for human and civil rights have effectively used 21st-century technology in communicating with each other from across the globe to risk taking a moment to a movement. This emerging energy from White and Black millennial activists has encouraged those already passionate about social justice to become change agents and leaders.

As the semester ended, I told my students how proud I was of their strength and resilience. I further told them how their voices are important and need to be heard outside the classroom because, as future social workers, they should strive for social justice and acknowledge the importance of understanding race and racism and being culturally competent in their practice.

Implications and recommendations for social work education

Based on the experiences of Black men on the street and in academia, as described in the preceding sections, we conclude this article by discussing implications for education from three dimensions. First, the society must be duly enlightened and better educated about the reality of the covert and institutionalized racism that still persists in the United States. There is an incorrect assumption that the emergence of the first African American president, and the successful ascension of some Black professionals, has erased the dehumanization of Black males. To this end, we propose the application of advocacy through different means (especially electronic, radio, TV, and social media) should be more intentional in educating the public and spotlighting instances of discrimination against Black men. We postulate that social work students can be among those who take the lead in such media advocacy as part of course assignments. If members of the broader society are conscious of media reports that spotlight discriminatory and racist practices against Black males in different sectors of the society, stereotypical and discriminatory tendencies may significantly be reduced. Although this suggestion may be considered by some as utopian, and unrealistic, it could be argued that true healing, reconciliation, and "re-dignification" of Black males starts with the same media outlets that have been used over the years to dehumanize, demonize, and depersonalize them.

Another example of the use of the media is embedded in the recent activities of organizations such as the NAACP in tracking the employment of Black information technology professionals in Silicon Valley and the subsequent response of fairer and more equitable employment opportunities

for Black professionals by information technology firms. This small example gives credence to the strategy of using conventional and emerging social media outlets to continuously highlight racism, and ultimately inform and reeducate society.

Second, we recommend a new paradigm for teaching social inequity that begins in elementary education instead of higher education. At the elementary through high school level, we propose that the five tenets of CRT previously highlighted be taught to students at an age-appropriate level. Children are more likely to develop their perception of Black males early in elementary schools (Young, 2011). The innocence, color-blindness, and empathy of children should be positively harnessed in educating 21st-century students to appreciate and respect the dignity and worth of Black men and all people of color. Furthermore, it is recommended that this content be taught across disciplines and curricula using a hybrid of the teaching and narrative experiences we have enumerated here. For instance, inviting a White male, who advocates against police brutality of Black males, may be better received by White students than deploying a Black teacher or advocate, as some students may feel that the Black teacher has a hidden agenda.

In addition, the current practice of teaching about social injustice predominantly in the social sciences and liberal arts is no longer sufficient. The natural and physical sciences also should integrate social inequity topics into their curricula; otherwise, graduates from such programs may be unprepared and not culturally competent to work with Black males in future work settings.

More specifically, social work educators irrespective of race should be more intentional in integrating social inequity content in both baccalaureate and graduate-level curricula instead of relying primarily on elective courses or minor content within current required course syllabi. Social work educators should be strategic, intentional, taking the lead in addressing the dehumanization of Black males in the United States and thereby preparing social work professionals to stand up for the rights and fair treatment of underrepresented clients.

Third, social work students, faculty, and practitioners should take a more activist role in ameliorating the dehumanization of the Black males. Social activism could take the form of identifying specific neighborhoods, companies, or even agencies that are involved in discriminatory practices and then assess and mobilize community resources to address such injustice. More often than not, social workers are reactive rather than proactive in advocating for the well-being of underrepresented clients, especially Black men. Further, social activism should include influencing policy and legislative outcomes and collaborating with Black institutions to address this malaise.

Conclusion

The recent reports of police shootings of Black males has gained international attention and has caused much social activism toward justice for this group of men among many within society. To say that this phenomenon is disconcerting is an understatement. Many Black males throughout the nation are feeling threatened and are apprehensive about any situation that results in an encounter with law enforcement officials. Social scientists and others are diligently seeking ways to stop the unnecessary deaths of Black males at the hands of police. Questions for further research that beg answers are as follows: What creates and perpetuates an environment where the police, who are charged with protecting all citizens, are in some instances the very ones who perpetrate lethal violence against certain cohorts of law abiding citizens? How is it that juries can view videos of unarmed Black males being shot and killed by police yet render a verdict that these officers are not guilty of any crime? These are among the questions that must be addressed if all people within this country can truly count on liberty and justice for all. The authors propose national and international discussion of this issue and teaching strategies for social work educators toward ameliorating this problem.

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